

THOUSANDS DEAD.

A Frightful Loss of Life in Pennsylvania.

The Bursting of a Huge Dam Submerges a Populous District.

The Most Terrible Disaster in the Country's History.

Men, Women and Children Engulfed in a Massive Wall of Water—Towns and Villages Wiped Out—Fire Adds Its Horrors to the Flood—The Financial Loss Estimated at \$40,000,000—Lynching Robbers of the Dead.

The fair and beautiful valley of the Conemaugh River, in Cambria County, Penn., has become a horrifying scene of devastation, ruin and death.

The wrecks of houses, stores and factories are strewn along the banks of the river for a distance of many miles. The city of Johnstown, with its 25,000 population, and numerous villages along the route of the raging torrent, are literally in ruins.

The loss of life is tremendous, thousands of people having been destroyed in the flood caused by the breaking of the greatest reservoir in the world. The dam of this reservoir gave way at its base at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, emptying the water of Conemaugh Lake, three miles long, three-quarters of a mile wide, and more than one hundred feet deep in places, into the valley.

Conemaugh Lake has been dammed by the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, composed of wealthy gentlemen of Pittsburgh. It was more than 250 feet above the Johnstown level, on the side of the Allegheny Mountains and the dam was 1000 wide, 110 feet high and 90 feet in thickness at the base. The top of the dam was over twenty feet wide.

Recognizing the danger to the valley below the company had the dam inspected every month by the Pennsylvania Railroad engineers, and their report was that nothing less than a convulsion of nature's forces could tear the barrier away.

The Coming of the Flood.

For forty-eight hours a steady and heavy rain had been falling all along the valley of the South Fork and Conemaugh Rivers, and at 5 o'clock the people of the valley had been warned of impending danger.

At 5 o'clock there was a water-spout, and then the dam gave way. With a rush and a roar the flood went pouring down the valley carrying everything before it. Sturdy elms and stanch old oaks were wrenched out of the ground and tossed and tumbled like straws by the irresistible torrent.

Four miles below the dam was the town of South Fork, where the South Fork empties into the Conemaugh. It had 500 houses and 2000 inhabitants. The warning had been received by the people of this devoted town and many of them had clamored up the mountain sides to await the subsidence of the storm, taking with them only a few belongings wherewith to stock improvised camps. From their places of security in an incredibly short time after 5 o'clock they saw their homes swept away and the town completely destroyed.

Down through the "Pack-saddle" came the rushing waters, already freighted with the trees and timbers of the valley above. The trunks and boughs of the trees, their first victims, were used by the angry torrent as weapons wherewith to strike destruction in its further course.

Many people were still in their houses, and the surging waters were so rapid in their movements that many of these were caught at their vocations and drowned at their posts. Others rushed to the upper floors only to be overtaken there, while some succeeded in reaching the roofs, and these were carried away with the tide and were seen tossing hither and thither on the upper wave, then submerged or dashed against some obstacle in the pathway of the vengeful torrent.

Gathering fresh impetus and fresh strength as it went, the flood rushed on and caught the little village of Mineral Point, four miles below. The Point had 800 inhabitants and was on a flat at the very bottom of the green-clad valley. It was completely overwhelmed in the terrible wall of waters that surged onward and must have been forty feet high.

Six miles further down the river, which runs alongside the tracks of the Pennsylvania road, was the beautiful little town of Conemaugh. Here the valley widened and the village sat on a little eminence, though in the center of the valley, and it was hoped that in a case of flood the torrent would be stopped here. Indeed, the people below Conemaugh had so much faith in this idea that they had made little or no preparation for the flood, even after the warning was sent out. But the devoted little Conemaugh was wrested from its foundations, and its homes and business houses were ruthlessly tossed and torn by the maddened waters, and her 2500 people were made homeless, while many of them were swept away by the tidal wave to destruction.

Woodvale, a village of 2000 inhabitants, a mile below, and the city of Johnstown, another mile down the valley, with her suburbs, Cambria City and Conemaugh Borough, were next caught in the flood.

The torrent had traveled eighteen miles, and it was forty feet deep when it washed over Johnstown.

Johnstown with her suburbs had a population of more than 25,000. The Cambria Iron and Steel Company employed 1800 men in their big factory and had \$5,000,000 worth of buildings, machinery and stock. All this was reduced to a ruin, and the devoted city was literally wiped out and thousands of lives were lost.

From places far up the mountain side fugitives from the flood watched the course of the destroyer as it did its ghastly work among their homes. After two hours but two roofs in the city could be seen above the water, and during those awful two hours those in safety had witnessed scenes such as have turned dark hair to gray and furrowed up smooth young faces with the seams and wrinkles like those of old age, while many a heart was torn and bleeding with anguish unspeakable.

In the flood as it came down the valley were hundreds of people clinging, with the grip of drowning ones, to trees to which they had taken at the first warning of the approaching flood. The trees had been torn up by the roots and carried away with their human freight.

Here and there one or two or three persons floated swiftly past on the roof of their homes or on some bulky article of furniture, the thing nearest to them when the tide reached them up the valley. And then there were

almost countless dead bodies rolled and tossed by the ruthless water, some of them still clinging, with the grasp of death, to some floating article, but most of them mangled from their holdings and castly in death.

All along the route of the flood people rushed to the bridges to give aid to those who might float down on the maddened sea, but as the terrific flood approached they saw how fruitless would be their efforts and how dangerous their attempt, and rushing from the bridges would reach the shore just in time to see the structure rent and torn asunder, their ruins added to the floating debris.

A Pitiful Sight.

The stream of human beings that was swept before the angry floods was something most pitiful to behold. Men, women and children were carried along frantically shrieking for help, but their cries availed them nothing. Rescue was impossible. Husbands were swept past their wives, and children were borne rapidly along at a terrible speed to certain death before the eyes of their terrorized and frantic parents. Houses, outbuildings, trees and barns were carried on the angry flood of waters as so much chaff. Cattle standing in the fields were overwhelmed, and their carcasses strewn the tide. The railroad tracks converging on the town were washed out, and wires in all directions were prostrated.

Clinging to improvised rafts, constructed in the death-battle from floating boards and timbers, were agonized men, women and children, their heartrending shrieks for help striking horror to the breasts of the onlookers. Their cries were of no avail. Carried along at a railway speed on the breast of this rushing torrent, no human ingenuity could devise a means of rescue.

It is impossible to describe briefly the suddenness with which the disaster came. A warning sound was heard at Conemaugh a few minutes before the rush of water came, but it was attributed to some meteorological disturbance, and no trouble was borrowed because of the thing unseen.

As the low, rumbling noise increased in volume, however, and came nearer, a suspicion of danger began to force itself even upon the bravest, which was increased to a certainty a few minutes later, when, with a rush, the mighty stream spread out in width, and when there was no time to do anything to save themselves. Many of the unfortunate were whirled into the vortex of the great disaster before they could turn around; men, women and children were struggling in the streets, and it is thought that many of the them never reached Johnstown, but only a mile or two below.

At Johnstown a similar scene was enacted, only on a much larger scale. The population is greater, and the sweeping whirlpool rushed into a denser mass of human beings. The imagination of the reader can better depict the spectacle than the pen of the writer can give it. It was a twilight of terror, and the gathering shades of evening closed in on a panorama of horrors that has few parallels in the history of casualties. The thought of rescue was madness, and the agony of the struggling, drowning victims found its response in the bosoms of those who stood wringing their hands in helpless horror in view of their friends. Now and then the waters would wash against one side of the mountain and then to the other side, carrying with them their human freight. This diversion enabled those on the banks to rescue many.

Some Individual Experiences.

At Bolivar the Conemaugh rose from six to forty feet, the water spread in five minutes over the whole country, and houses went floating down, men, women and children clinging to the debris, shrieking wildly for aid. The people of Garfield, on the opposite side of the river, rushed to the stone bridge below the town with ropes, and the imagination of the reader can better depict the spectacle than the pen of the writer can give it. It was a twilight of terror, and the gathering shades of evening closed in on a panorama of horrors that has few parallels in the history of casualties. The thought of rescue was madness, and the agony of the struggling, drowning victims found its response in the bosoms of those who stood wringing their hands in helpless horror in view of their friends. Now and then the waters would wash against one side of the mountain and then to the other side, carrying with them their human freight. This diversion enabled those on the banks to rescue many.

"Shortly after 5 o'clock, says young Hessler, 'there was a rush and roar of waters and we heard screaming people outside. Our home was on the side hill and my father said the water would not reach us. The houses further down were being swept away, and we all went up into the third story. I was scared and I jumped upon a bed. It was an old-fashioned bed, with big, stout posts. The water reached that floor and kept rising till my bed was afloat. My gray father and my sister, Miss Kintz, and John Hirsch climbed out of a window with Mary and Mrs. Kintz, but I staid on the bed. It kept rising, and finally the big posts were pushed through the ceiling. I crawled out through one of the holes made that way and got on the roof. There I saw the men who got out of the window on trees. Mary and Mrs. Kintz must have drowned, and Miss Smith was also drowned. The water kept rising and I saw grandfather and father, caught in the tree by the water, covered over and drowned. John Hirsch and the four children were also drowned in a tree. My roof parted and then I sailed away at awful speed. Live bodies and corpses were all about me in the water. I would hear somebody shriek in the water and then they would disappear. All along people on shore tried to save us, but they could do nothing, the water carried us along so fast. Only a few were saved.'

A man named Young, living in Johnstown, floated down the flood on a bit of floor. He held two women in his arms. At the upper bridge, at Bolivar, a rope was thrown to them. Young tried to grasp it and hold fast to the women, one of whom was his aged mother, but he was jerked away from them. Then he bravely dropped the rope and fell back upon the raft, again taking the women in his arms. A little further down the frail raft floated toward the edge of the flood. Young seized the overhanging branches of a tree and had succeeded, by Herculean efforts in placing the women on the upper boughs, when the heavy debris of a bridge came down on the flood, struck the tree, tore it from the ground and hurled it into the water, drowning all three.

Young's heroism filled the minds of the distracted spectators only a few moments to give place to admiration to that of a mother who, floating under the bridge on the roof of a shed with her two little ones in her arms, shook her head sadly when a rope was lowered to her and clung more closely to her babes. The mother's sacrifice was averted at Cokerville, a little further down, for all three were rescued.

A little girl, kneeling, her hands clasped in prayer, passed down on the torrent on a bit of flooring. There was a beatific expression on the white, frightened face as she passed on to death a little further on, where her raft was shattered against a tree.

At Lockport, about eighteen miles from Johnstown, Eliel Benson, an old man, Mrs. Boyle, Paddy Madden and two Hungarians were rescued. Mr. Benson said:

"I live in Cambria City. I think not less

than 1500 people were lost. In the house with me on Chestnut street were ten persons besides myself, and I feel sure they were all lost. Up to 4 o'clock the water, which was about seven feet deep in the streets, remained stationary. At about four o'clock in the afternoon the great rush came. In fifteen minutes the water rose fully ten feet, and in five minutes more I am sure fifty houses came floating down the streets. There were people in every one of them, and God only knows how many were lost. As they were carried off the houses were jammed together and against the houses still standing, and in a very few minutes they were all battered to pieces before they had been carried very far. The house I was in was soon smashed to pieces, and I managed to jump on to a cellar door. In a few minutes I was pushed off into the flood, and when I looked back where Cambria City stood there was nothing but a great lake of water. It looked to me if every house had been raised or covered over. The vast sheet of water was full of floating timbers, roofs of houses, rafts and other articles. The scene was indescribable. The cries of the men, women, and children were fearful. I passed Paddy Madden's wife, my son's wife, and a man clinging to the roof of a house. I called to them and bade them good-by. In a short time I was turned over. Every once in a while I got into a whirlpool and almost lost my grip on the cellar door. I saw people in the water ahead of me. Many of them were struck by the crashing timbers and killed outright. They were so badly hurt that they fell into the water and drowned at once."

Fire's Added Horrors.

Of all the frightful occurrences the most terrible was the fire, in which Supervisor Hays of the Pennsylvania Railroad estimated that from 1000 to 2000 unfortunate beings were burned to death. The sight was so heartrending that the bravest turned pale and sickened. Over three hundred frame houses were jammed together in a heap forty feet high against the massive viaduct of the Pennsylvania Railroad at Johnstown. All the houses were destroyed and the majority of the inmates crushed to death before the terrible fire began. Men, women and children, with their limbs pinioned between the timbers, their blood slowly ebbing away, begged piteously for relief. One unfortunate woman asked a man on the bank for God's sake to cut her legs off. A man was caught by the arm and pleaded piteously for a knife to sever the member. Others were literally smashed and squeezed to death beneath the grinding timbers and surging waters. Some were pressed deep into the water, and the flood soon ended their misery.

But to add to the horror of this scene a fire broke out in the mass of timbers, and nobody escaped. The flames soon devoured the people, and nothing remained but the charred and scattered corpses floating about on the water. Supervisor Hays stood on the bank watching the fire, powerless to render the victims any assistance. The cries of suffering and pain only doubled the horror of the great disaster. Long after dark the flames of fire shot high above the burning mass of lumber, lighting up the vast flood of rushing waters on all sides.

Two Trains Overwhelmed.

A frightful disaster occurred to two of the through trains from Pittsburgh, which were supposed to be en route to Conemaugh. A train east bound from Chicago to New York, and the mail train from Pittsburgh, bound east, were put on the back tracks in the yard at Conemaugh when the flooded condition of the main tracks made it apparently unsafe to proceed further. When the continued rise of the water made their danger apparent, the frightened passengers fled from the two trains to the hills nearby. Some in their wild excitement threw themselves into the raging current and were drowned. A number of persons were lost this way. When Superintendent Trump reached Conemaugh, he immediately gathered together the remaining passengers of the two trains, and had them conveyed to Ebensburg by wagon, a distance of about ten miles.

After the people had deserted the cars, the railroad officials state, the two Pullman cars attached to the day express were set on fire and entirely consumed. A car of lime was standing near the train. When the water reached the lime it set fire to the car and, the flames reaching the sleepers, they were entirely consumed.

Recovering Dead Bodies.

All along the river between the Allegheny River and Johnstown dead bodies were picked up. In a ten-acre field at Nineveh seventy-five bodies were taken out within a half mile of each other. Of this number only five were men. The rest were women and children. Many beautiful young girls, refined in features and handsomely dressed, were found, and many of them were found lying in stretchers out on the ground with calm faces. Many a tear was dropped by the men as they worked away removing the bodies. An old lady with fine gray hair was picked up alive, although nearly every bone in her body was broken. Judging from the number of women and children found in the swamps of Nineveh the female portion of the population suffered most.

Sir. O'Connor was at Sang Hollow, a few miles west of Johnstown, when the flood began. He remained there through the afternoon and night, and he says that there was a fatal tree on an island against which a number of persons were dashed and instantly killed. Their bodies were almost tied in a knot doubled over the tree by the force of the current. Mr. O'Connor says that the first man who came down in his boat was knocked out against this obstruction; in fact, all those who hit the tree met the same fate and were instantly killed. He could give no estimate of the number lost at this point, but he makes the figures large. Mr. O'Connor says he never saw such an awful spectacle. The poor people in the raging flood cried out in terror for aid that never came. Gladly would the brave men standing upon the banks have helped them out, but this was impossible. More than one brave man risked his life in trying to save those in the flood.

Robbers of the Dead Lynched.

A Hungarian laborer was lynched at Johnstown and six others were shot, as a lesson to the ghouls who have been despoiling the dead and plundering the living. The ghouls who were lynched were caught in the act of cutting off the finger of a dead woman to possess himself of the ring. An infuriated mob seized him and promptly strung him up to a telegraph pole. The lesson had a salutary effect.

The Hungarians got hold of a number of barrels of whisky, and the liquor was served out to the mob in buckets. The result was pandemonium let loose. The liquor quickly told on empty stomachs and excited brains, and every man of them was set crazy drunk. The drunken horde of Huns started out to loot the houses and to plunder the dead. They seized everything that came in their way, and

in their frenzied haste to possess themselves of valuables mutilated the dead.

They made a raid on the First National Bank a little after midnight, and would have succeeded in getting considerable booty if a party of armed citizens, apprised of their evil doings, had not come upon them in the nick of time. The citizens poured a volley in upon them and six of them were laid low. The rest were either captured or put to flight.

Another incident of even greater moment was brought to notice. At 8:30 o'clock A. M. an old railroad, who had walked from Sang Hollow, stepped up to a number of men who were congregated on the platform station at Curranville, and said: "Gentlemen, had I a shotgun with me half an hour ago I would now be a murderer, yet with no fear of ever having to suffer for my crime. Two miles below here I watched three men going along the banks stealing the jewels from the bodies of the dead wives and daughters of men who have been robbed of all they held dear of earth." He had no sooner finished the last sentence than five burly men with looks of terrible determination written on their faces were on their way to the scene of plunder, one with a coil of rope over his shoulder and another with a revolver in his hand. In twenty minutes, so it is stated, they had overtaken two of their victims, who were then in the act of cutting pieces from the ears and fingers from the hands of the bodies of two dead women. With revolver leveled at the scoundrels the leader of the posse shouted: "Throw up your hands or I'll blow your heads off."

With blanched faces and trembling forms they obeyed the order and begged for mercy. They were searched, and as their pockets were emptied of their finds the indignation of the crowd intensified, and when a bloody finger of an infant, encircled with two tiny gold rings, was found among the plunder in the leader's pocket a cry went up: "Lynch them!" Without a moment's delay ropes were thrown around their necks and they were dangling to the limbs of a tree, in the branches of which an hour before were entangled the bodies of a dead father and son. After half an hour the ropes were cut and the bodies lowered and carried to a pile of rocks in the forest on the hill above.

Measures for Relief.

From every part of the country, from the National Government and from the Governors of States have come offers of relief to the people of the desolated region. In New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, Atlanta, and other cities, subscriptions were opened to aid the homeless and helpless. Philadelphia sent the biggest relief train ever forwarded over the line. A relief train filled with clothing and necessities of life was also sent out from Pittsburgh. The proclamations of the Mayors of many towns brought a generous response, and the movement to aid the people who have suffered by the greatest disaster in our country's history, has been warm-hearted and widespread as the nation's confines.

A correspondent who was among the first to reach Johnstown after the flood, subsidence had permitted entrance into the city estimated the number of dead at from 6000 to 10,000, and the financial loss at \$40,000,000.

THIRTY DROWNED.

Men and Boys Swept With a Bridge Into the Susquehanna.

A frightful calamity has occurred at Williamsport, Penn. Thirty persons, the majority of them boys under eighteen years of age, were swept from a bridge into the Susquehanna River and drowned in the presence of hundreds of spectators.

A great throng stood on the banks of the river watching its mad rush. On a wooden bridge spanning the stream about forty persons were looking at the flotsam that was dashing down. Suddenly there came a cry of warning from those on shore. A great mass recognized as the ruins of a building known as the Beach Mill, came into sight and was borne swiftly toward the bridge. The water was almost level with the floor of the structure and as the splintered doors and pieces of roof, piled in a confused but compact mass, reached the bridge there was a crash. Two or three men nearest the shore leaped into safety. The others had no time to think, much less to act. In an instant the bridge was crushed into fragments and thirty-three men and boys were plunged into the seething torrent. Three of them managed to reach shore, but the remaining thirty perished within sight of the hundreds on the banks.

Two strong, handsome boys, evidently good swimmers, made a desperate effort to stem the current. A heavy oak door struck one of them in the head and crushed in his skull. The other boy was buried beneath a huge piece of roof and was seen no more. In less than ten minutes after the bridge had been struck not one of the victims was to be seen.

BABY McKEE CHRISTENED.

President Harrison's Grandchild Baptized in the Blue Room.

The President had a pleasant little surprise in store for the members of his Cabinet the other day. Shortly before the meeting adjourned he announced that the infant of his daughter, Mrs. McKee, would be christened in the blue room after the meeting. Secretary Blaine had some business to attend to and could not wait, but the other members present—Messrs. Tracy, Windom, Noble, Wadsworth and Miller—remained for the ceremony. Besides these and the President and Mrs. Harrison, there were present Mr. and Mrs. McKee, Private Secretary Halford, "Baby" McKee and a few attendants.

Dr. Scott, the great grandfather of the child, performed the ceremony. There were four generations present, Dr. Scott, Mrs. Harrison, Mrs. McKee and her children. The christening was entirely informal, and was not performed according to any particular church ritual. The baby was called after her mother, Mary, with the addition of "Lodge," a family name. The ceremony was conducted quietly, and the President and Mrs. Harrison expressed the wish that as little attention as possible be given to it.

RIOTS IN RUSSIA.

Striking Miners Resort to Arson—Seven Victims in the Flames.

The silver miners in the Ural Mountains, Russia, have struck and have set on fire the houses of the managers in Ekaterinburg. The factories adjoining were also set afire and seven persons who were in the buildings were burned to death. The military were called out and restored order.

SUPREME CHIEF BARNES reported at Boston to the tenth annual session of the Supreme Court, Knights of the Golden Eagle, that there are 50,000 members and 534 castles in thirty States. The total receipts were \$14,631, and expenditures \$18,438.

W. D. PRUDEN.

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References—Chief Justice Smith, Raleigh, N. C.; C. W. Grandy & Sons, Exchange National Bank, Norfolk, Va.; Whedbee & Dickinson, Elmont Bros., Baltimore, Md.; and Wm. Stowe, Boston, Mass.

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